Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington DC 20554

In the Matter of	**)**	**WT Docket 05-235**
Amendment of Part 97 of the	**)**	
Commission's Rules to Implement	**)**	
WRC-03 Regulations Applicable to	**)**	
Requirements for Operator Licenses	**)**	
in the Amateur Radio Service.	**)**	

Supplementary Comments Regarding the Notice of Proposed Rule Making and Order Adopted July 15, 2005.

I, Albert J. Schramm, W3MIV, am a licensed amateur radio operator. I enjoy no position or privilege beyond that of any other radio amateur of my license class. The statements I put forth in this comment are my own, and they do not necessarily reflect the views of any other amateur radio licensee, nor those of any group or coalition.

Introduction

On 22 July 2005 I filed a comment regarding the potential problems of station identification in the future as a result of the removal of Morse testing and a consequent reduction of amateur operators who can decipher station ID when transmitted via CW on a phone band. In that filing, I declined to comment on the wisdom of removing all Morse testing because the wording of the NPRM&O seemed to indicate a decision that was already beyond possible dissuasion. I now come again to add a supplement to that initial comment filing. I believe the Commission's intent to remove all Morse testing is an error that I must address.

In addition, I also believe the decision to refuse to consider changes to the Technician license as an entry-level license to be in error.

After much reflection, and also after witnessing or taking part in many of the discussions on the air and on many internet sites about this NPRM&O and its potential impacts on the Amateur Radio service in the US, I believe these two errors to be of sufficient importance to warrant this supplementary filing.

Discussion

1. Morse testing. Among the objectives set forth in Part 97.1[1] are the desirability of creating a pool of skilled operators who may assist with vital communications in time of community emergencies, the expansion of the pool of "trained" operators, the advancement of the radio "art," and the furtherance of international goodwill. Each of these objectives establishes a rational for retaining the Morse code as a functioning element of amateur radio, an element that cannot continue without the support of a testing mandate.

- Though Morse code is a non-vital mode for modern emergency communications, it nevertheless can provide a significant benefit to emergency communications as a supplement to phone and digital modes. It is the ultimate "low-tech" mode of operation: there is no requirement for a computer, as with other digital modes; only the human ear is needed to decipher Morse. Morse code does not depend upon *any other* equipment than the radio transceiver, and this component can be of simplified construction and very low power, running on battery or solar power, and still provide effective communications in time of need. It can be a highly effective tool under those circumstances which limit or preclude operation of other modes, but only if trained operators practiced in the Morse code are available to use this tool.
- The Morse code cannot be viewed as anything other than the foundation of radio communications. In its most modern iterations, unlike the original use with "spark" transmitters, CW is rivaled only by PSK31, a mode which cannot be operated without a digital computer, in its efficiency with regard to use of frequency spectrum. From the standpoint of sheer numbers of distinct transmissions that can be fitted without mutual interference into a narrow band of frequencies, CW is nearly without peer. In consideration of the simplicity of gear needed, as cited in the paragraph above, there has

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1§97.1 Basis and purpose.

The rules and regulations in this Part are designed to provide an amateur radio service having a fundamental purpose as expressed in the following principles:

(a) Recognition and enhancement of the value of the amateur service to the public as a voluntary noncommercial communication service, particularly with respect to providing emergency communications.

(b) Continuation and extension of the amateur's proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art.

(c) Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communications and technical phases of the art.

(d) Expansion of the existing reservoir within the amateur radio service of trained operators, technicians, and electronics experts.

(e) Continuation and extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill.

never been any “advancement” of the radio “art” that has come close to paralleling Morse, therefore, its abandonment is a step backward, not an advance.

- Through the use of various “Q” codes, prosigns, and a range of traditional abbreviations, some astonishingly sophisticated conversations across difficult language barriers are possible with Morse code. Unlike verbal communications, unlike computer keyboards, the fundamentals of Morse code can cut through barriers in ways that promote international good will with a minimum investment in hardware or education. No other mode comes close to rivaling Morse in this respect.
- The retention of a Morse code test for a single license class will in no way encumber those interested in achieving an amateur radio license, including those who seek to enjoy HF privileges. There will still be value in the idea of an incentive to advance that its removal will damage to some unforeseeable extent.
- The decision of the WRC-03 conference did not mandate the removal of Morse testing. The conference’s decisions make no recommendation, and permit the retention of Morse testing by any national authority so desiring to retain it. For example, Japan, a nation with a long tradition of amateur radio interest and participation, has opted to retain the Morse test for its highest license class. Most of the world’s radio authorities have not yet acted to remove or change Morse testing, though two years have passed since the issuance of the WRC-03 report. The US does not need to remove the Morse code test to meet the requirements of the ITU or to dovetail with the rest of the world’s radio authorities.
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Recommendation

I urge the Commission to reconsider the stated decision to remove the requirement for passing a 5 wpm Morse code test for the Amateur Extra class license. Retaining this requirement will provide an incentive for those who wish to achieve this license class to study the code; many who do so will find that they enjoy working this mode and will motivate themselves to excel in it, thus adding to that pool of skilled operators on whom we may depend should there ever be such a need. In the final analysis, keeping this requirement in place will cost little or nothing, whereas its removal could prove harmful in years ahead. Without a mandate to study Morse code, the likely result will be its gradual disappearance, which will benefit no one.

2. Entry-Level License. The clear refusal to deal with a new entry-level license category, and the subsequent retention of the existing Novice legacy license and Technician licenses as separate license classes, will result in the continuation of a fundamental flaw in the structure that needs to be addressed.

Since 2003, the total number of amateur operators in the US has declined by some 25,000 overall. Novice, Advanced, General and the Technician classes have declined and the only the Amateur Extra class has grown significantly. The slow attrition of Novice and Advanced licenses and the steady growth of the Amateur Extra class would seem to indicate that the incentive to upgrade is working. The reduction in the number of General licenses could also be the result of incentive upgrades. The apparent stagnation in the numbers of Technician licenses, given that this is the sole "entry-level" license at present, seems to point to a problem that needs to be addressed.

Recommendation

I would respectfully urge the Commission to revisit the ARRL's entry-license recommendations in RM-10867. The refusal to make accommodation for a new entry category is an error that can only result in greater attrition in the years ahead. In addition, the removal of the Morse testing requirement for HF access, and the refusal to come to some accommodation with the current Technician Plus category, will result in the loss of privileges now enjoyed by that hermaphrodite class of license. This is a clear violation of a "traditional" pledge by the Commission that no amateur licensee would ever lose privileges through a regulatory change.

Conclusion

The decision to remove the mandate for Morse code testing is a controversial one, and it is generating much heated commentary and rancorous debate. Indeed, it would seem that no such high-profile issue has animated amateur radio ranks since the "incentive licensing debacle" of some forty years ago. Though much of this clamor is the result of simple resistance to change, the rule changes we initiate now are ones we will have to live with for the next several years. In my view, it would be wise to "bite the bullet" now and seek a regulatory structure for both license classes and testing that will not have to be revisited at some date in the not-to-distant future to correct a lapse that will result from short-sighted expediency.

Thank you for the privilege of making my views in this matter known.

Sincerely,

Albert J. Schramm, W3MIV